

Inside Sales Habits Formed in the Tumult of 2020 Foreshadow the Trends for 2021

Wednesday, December 23, 2020 - Written by: [Jeff Kalter](#)



As the year comes to a close, we doubt that you will be sorry to say goodbye to 2020. It's been a challenging year for all of us, with more than a few surprises along the way.

Even so, once the dust settles and we're well-entrenched in 2021, could we look back and see the year from hell as a blessing in disguise?

Please stick with me here. If there's one word that describes 2020, it has to be "change." Our work, life at home, even our kids' schools have all experienced a transformation. I hope that one of the long-term effects of so much change is that we're all feeling a bit more flexible and agile when it comes to embracing future change.

That said, I want to focus on the workplace and some selling trends, especially for inside sales, that we foresee for 2021.

The pandemic threw our workplaces into turmoil during the first quarter of 2020. Ironically, however, the shift to remote working and virtual selling just reinforced changes that slowly had been catching on in sales for several years.

As a case in point, Forrester estimates that at least 80% of the buyer's journey was already happening digitally and remotely. Sales departments simply needed to acknowledge that reality and respond accordingly.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz, the author of *Psycho Cybernetics* (1960), suggested that it takes 21 days to form a habit. Well, even if it takes 22 days or six months, we've had more than enough time for new buying, selling and working habits to take hold.

And on that note, here are 11 trends that we believe will change selling and sales forever.

Inside Sales Comes Into Its Own

It's a trend that's grown since at least 2013, with many of the largest B2B tech vendors aggressively growing their inside sales forces. At the same time, buyers have had several years to become comfortable working with reps by phone.

Now, with the tools to do their job and the expectation for sales to work remotely and virtually, we can expect that the distinction between inside and field sales will virtually disappear in 2021.

1 - Work-From-Anywhere Culture Here to Stay

Again, from Forrester, we can expect remote work to surpass pre-pandemic numbers by at least 300%. And we'll never return to a pre-Covid-19 workplace.

Ultimately, we'll probably settle on a hybrid work environment, with some people working entirely from home and others splitting time between home and the office. With a phone and internet access, a sales rep can work from anywhere.

2 - Even Greater Sales and Marketing Alignment

Account-based marketing has undoubtedly shown the value of sales and marketing working closely. Together, they can more effectively develop and implement programs that target buyers most likely to benefit from a company's products and services and campaigns that speak directly to buyers' wants and needs.

3 - Lead Quality Supersedes Quantity

Gartner reports that CMOs will spend more on lead production in 2021. At the same time, we believe lead quality will rise dramatically. That's because of the increased focus on customer priorities and artificial intelligence (AI), which will benefit lead qualification and quality.

Digital Domination of the Sales Process

Digital is the backbone of our increasingly virtual world. It's the power behind the tools that deliver a positive sales experience.

4 - Sales Videos Take Off

What field reps once needed to do face-to-face can now occur via video at the buyer's convenience 24/7. Expect to see more explainer videos showcasing products and services, detailed demos and even client testimonials. Hand-in-hand with video will be more webinars and virtual online sales events.

5 - Automation and AI: Tools and technology have always been critical to inside sales reps, enabling them to communicate, share content with prospects, build strong relationships and, above all, sell. Although budgets will remain tight for a while in 2021, we'll see companies investing more heavily in technology. Sophisticated technology is no longer a competitive advantage. It's the cost of entry to today's marketplace.

6 - Communication Beyond Email: Alternative platforms for customer

communication continue to catch on as sales reps adapt to customer preferences. In addition to email, we see more effective use of text and MMS, InMail, chat and third-party apps like WeChat and WhatsApp.

7 - Focus on Omni-channel Outreach: On average, a B2B buyer will visit at least six channels during the buying journey. While companies need to go where the buyers are, it's not enough simply to have a presence everywhere. Companies need to present a consistent brand and message. Expect omni-channel outreach to become more sophisticated and cohesive in 2021.

Buyers Come into Central Focus

Although the B2B sales process is typically more complex, with longer sales cycles than B2C, B2B buyers are still consumers at heart. In 2021, companies will treat B2B buyers more like valued consumers.

8 - Online Customer Experience

Make it good; make it convenient; and make it digital. In a 2020 CMO survey, a whopping 84% of customers put their customer experience quality above a company's brand. While companies have been upping the customer experience in the last few years, they'll be kicking it into overdrive in 2021.

9 - Greater Convergence of High-Tech, High-Touch

Expect high-tech, high-touch to take on a new dimension in 2021. The experience needs to go beyond those of the buyer persona to those of the individual buyer. It needs to have the right balance of self-serve digital control and access to sales reps. To know you're getting it right, ask your customers from time to time.

10 - Reinforcing Relationships

It's no secret that it takes longer and costs more to win over a new customer than to sell to a satisfied customer. But it's taken a pandemic for companies to appreciate their existing customer base thoroughly. You can expect to see an increased effort to reinforce the buyer-seller relationship: more communication, better customer service and an emphasis on listening.

11 - Giving Customers More Ways to Buy

In 2019, research showed an unmet demand for B2B e-commerce. While 30% of buyers wanted to buy 90% of products online, only 19% of vendors complied. As part of customer responsiveness and the digital revolution, buyers will have more purchasing options available.

The events of 2020 have helped define the sales environment for 2021. Given that, expect inside salespeople, who are already comfortable in a digital workplace and experienced communicating remotely with customers, to lead the way in the New Year.

Call us at +1 813-320-0500 (US) or +39 06 978446 60 (EMEA), or contact us online for help meeting your sales goals.

Published in

[Lead Qualification](#)